

## **Discourse on Madrassah Education Reform in Pakistan: Challenges to State Narrative and its Implications**

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### **ABSTRACT**

It is generally perceived that Madrassah produce extremism which possesses a threat to the peace and security of the state and to the world as well. Government along with local and International community wants to eradicate extremism and terrorism through reforming Madrassah education. The purpose of current study is to answer the question “why attempts of Madrassah reforms were unfruitful”? By focusing on it, study is divided into three phase such as to find out; different narrative on Madrassah reform, potential barriers in the way of reform and skepticisms associated with reformist policy.

The main objective of current study is to understand the problems regarding Madrassah reform through realistic approach by addressing main question what are the challenges in developing alternative narrative on Madrassah reforms and its implications? The main investigation has three driving questions that what Madrassah reform means in point of view of different actors? What are main obstacles in the process of reform? And what are skepticisms about reform?

In this qualitative study stakeholder interviews have been conducted. Results of the study indicates that Government narrative with regards to Madrassah education reform is to bring them into mainstream whereas religious community think that there are hidden agendas behind the modernization of Madrassahs. They viewed Madrassahs reforms to dilute the attention of religious sector from religious education to western education. Similarly, it viewed that changes in curricula, financial control, regulatory change, and vested interest are the main hurdles in the way of reform.

**Keywords:** *Madrassah Reform, Government Narrative, Clerics discourse, Skepticism about Reforms.*

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## Introduction

In ancient Islam, Madrassahs were the center of both secular and religious education. People particularly Muslims from different level of society advanced towards and enrolled in such institutions to enhance their knowledge about basic principle of sharia/Islam as well as knowledge on other fields of life. Infected the concept of modern institutions such as universities came up from the Madrassahs.<sup>(1)</sup> The notion of division in secular education (need-based and market oriented education) and Madrassah education (religious based education) is hardly ever noted in the history of Islam but this strict division has been a topic of discussion thought-out history of sub-continent after colonial rule.<sup>(2)</sup> Previously, the Madrassah based education system primarily focused on the process of authentic and extensive scholarly research as compared to contemporary Madrassahs which are largely centered on basics such as memorization of *Qur'ān*, *Tafsīr*, *Hadīth*, *fiqh*, and *'Uṣūl-al-fiqh*.<sup>(3)</sup>

Soon after the independence, the government of Pakistan established *Auqāf* department under the ministry of religious affairs, to engage the clergy in policy making and integrate with other segment of society.<sup>(4)</sup> Generally, religious scholars (clergy) focused on sectarian prejudices rather than to the part of main stream politics and policy making process. Therefore, sect specific education and Fatwa at every public issue<sup>(5)</sup> cause intolerance in society and inflexibility in religious thoughts. In late 1950's religious leaders from different sects realized that there should be uniformity and coordination of Madrassah activities within one school of thought across the country.<sup>(6)</sup> Therefore, they established five boards like secular education system to represent major religious school of thoughts. The main objectives of these boards were; to develop a standardized religious based curriculum, hold annual examinations within the Madrassah, registration of Madrassah, and issue degree certificates of

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- (1) Syed Waqās 'Alī Kausar & Abdul Wāḥid Sial, "The Impact of systematic structure of Madrassa on student's outcome: Do they need structural reforms," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 14, No. 41,(Summer 2015), 127-147
  - (2) Sultān Ali Ṣawābī, *Madrassah Reform and State Power in Pakistan*, (Islamabad: Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, 2012AD), xii
  - (3) Ashok K. Behuria, "Sects within Sect: The Case of Deobandi–Barelvi Encounter in Pakistan," *Strategic Analysis* 32, No.1 (2008AD), 61
  - (4) Kausar & Sial, "The Impact of systematic structure of Madrassa," 128.
  - (5) Luthfi Assyaukanie, "Fatwa and Violence in Indonesia", *Journal of Religion and Society*, 11 (2009AD), 1-3
  - (6) Rauf Klasra, "Curricula of 8,000 madāris being changed," *The News*, June 10, 2002AD

Islamic proficiency. Madrassah of respective sects voluntarily registered themselves under these boards which was purely an initiative of the *Ulamā* (religious scholars) of respective religious sects.<sup>(1)</sup> Governments have recognized these boards soon after its establishment. Therefore, these boards are responsible for the registration and regulation of Madrassahs of their respective school of thought. It is pertinent to mention that all Madrassahs are not registered with their respective school of thought board. These boards don't have the authority to force Madrassahs for registration as it is purely voluntary basis.<sup>(2)</sup>

No doubt that Madrassah had great contribution in preserving the core of Islam but at the same time it also seized to modernize and resurrect the lost identity of Muslim.<sup>(3)</sup> The religious ranks associated with Madrassah claims that Madrassahs are producing religious professionals (clerics) as other secular institutions are producing professionals like doctors, engineering so on and so forth. They also argued that secular educational institutions are teaching curricula devise by the west.

Madrassah reform is the need of hour to challenge the existing narrative that Madrassah education is producing extremists and terrorists. Therefore, Madrassah reforms provide alternative narrative and bring religious community in the public policy making process.<sup>(4)</sup> For this purpose, governments convince some leading '*Ulamā* (clerics) whereas some leading '*Ulamā* have serious concerns and reservations on Madrassah reforms. There is trust deficit between government and religious community which indicates some leading '*Ulamā* along with religious political parties are not satisfied with the Madrassah reforms. Apart from this, there is no mandatory mechanism for the Madrassahs registration before establishment of Madrassah. Government always encourages Madrassah management for voluntary registration. Therefore, Madrassah are thus neither directly regulated nor directly registered with government of Pakistan. The status of registered Madrassah is enjoyed by those that have sought formal affiliation with one of the five boards of their respective school of thought. It is estimated that only few percent of

(1) Behuria, "Sects Within Sect", 58-59

(2) Sawabi, *Madrassah Reform and State Power in Pakistan*, 37.

(3) Johan Eddebo, "Taw hīd al 'uluhiyya, Secularism, and Political Islam," *Journal of Religion and Society*, 16 (2014AD), 1-7

(4) R. Georges Delamontagne, "Religiosity and Hate Groups: An Exploratory and Descriptive Correlational Study," *Journal of Religion and Society*, 12, (2010AD), 1-19

Madrassahs are registered with their respective boards.<sup>(1)</sup> Most of the Madrassah are not registered and act autonomously. Therefore, it is difficult to know the actual number of registered and unregistered Madrassahs in the country.

In the past, government made little efforts to reform Madrassah education by upgrading it to the level of formal education. Therefore, these reforms mostly focused to give equivalence of Madrassah education to the formal education like equivalence. Governments along with other actors have failed to develop narrative on the Madrassah reforms. Therefore, no serious efforts were taken to change the structure and system of Madrassah education in the country. APS incident (attack on army public school in Peshawar in December 2014) spotlights the need of Madrassah reforms as well as alternative narrative in the country. Government along with all political parties have formulated national action plan to deal with extremism and terrorism in the country. Therefore, Madrassah reform is one of the points in 20 points of National Action Plan. Government of Pakistan started an initiative to reform Madrassah like structure, registration, rule and regulation as well as curricula modification. The main objective of current study is to understand the problems regarding Madrassah reform through realistic approach by addressing main question what are the challenges in developing alternative narrative on Madrassah reforms and its implications? Beside this, we have three driving questions for the main query. These are the following;

1. What Madrassah reform mean in point of view of different actors?
2. What are main obstacles in the process of reform?
3. What are skepticisms about reform?

### Literature Review

Seeking knowledge is obligatory as said by Holy Prophet (ﷺ) focusing on this premise, in the period of Muhammad (ﷺ) and rightly guided caliphs, mosques were used to be hub of gaining scientific, public policy and religious knowledge. Most of public policy and administrative issues were discussed and solved in mosques in those glorious regimes. After the passing of Muhammad (ﷺ) and His pious caliphs, religious education system was controlled and managed by *Imāms* (founders of new school of thought) and interpretation of various religious matters was done

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(1) Qadeer Tanoli, "Provinces miserably fail to registered Madrassas," *The Express Tribune*, 30 August 2018

by Independent thinking (*Ijtihād*).<sup>(1)</sup> The followers of each *Imām* established their own schools to spread their respective *Imām's Fiqh* (sectarian views). The founders of these schools were very flexible in their views and approaches for the interpretation of Islamic thoughts and never claimed to be perfect.<sup>(2)</sup>

The concept of first Madrassah in the history of Islam was driven in 11<sup>th</sup> century in the regime of *Nizāmuddīn* and known as *Madrassah Nizāmia*.<sup>(3)</sup> The syllabus of first Madrassah was designed in that time which pertained translation and interpretation of teaching of *Qur'ān* and *Hadīth* with more focusing on *Fiqhi* Issues and teachings.<sup>(4)</sup> The syllabus of *Madrassah Nizāmia* also pertain the need-based and market oriented subjects such as mathematics, astronomy and other social sciences subjects. Similarly, in sub-continent syllabus of religious education was designed in 17<sup>th</sup> century by *Mulla Nizāmuddīn Sihālvī* which is known as *Dars-e-Nizāmi*.<sup>(5)</sup> It focuses on two aspects such as “revealed sciences” (*Wahī*) and “rational sciences” (*ma'qūlāt*).<sup>(6)</sup> The revealed sciences revolve around the translation and interpretation of Holy *Qur'ān*, *Hadīth*, and Islamic jurisprudence; whereas the rational sciences cover Arabic Persian basic linguistic, literature and grammar issues like, logic, rhetoric, and philosophy.

In the eighteenth century after the independence war in 1857, East India Company got full power in sub-continent; they introduced modern secular education in English language. They replaced Persian as official language by English and also changed the legal system of the country from Islamic to British. Before this, most of administrative works and legal matters were settled by clerics and *Qāḍī* (religious scholars).<sup>(7)</sup> In the

- (1) Mumtaz Ahmad, “Madrassah Educaiton in Pakistan and Balgladesh”, *Religious Radiclism and Secuirty in South Asia*, eds. Satu P. Limaye, Mohan Malik and Robert G. Wirsing, (Hawaii: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2014AD), 101-115.
- (2) Dilyana Mincheva, “Critical Islam Debating/Negotiating Modernity,” *Journal of Religion and Society*, 14, (2012AD), 1-15
- (3) Sawabi, *Madrassah Reform and State Power in Pakistan*, 14
- (4) Jean-Philippe Platteau, “Religion, politics, and development: Lessons from the lands of Islam,” *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 68, No.2, (2008AD), 329-351
- (5) Christopher M. Blanchard, “Islamic Religious Schools, Madrassa: Background”, *CRS Report for Congress*, January 23, (2008AD), 1-6, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RS21654.pdf>
- (6) Musa Khan Jalazai & Tasneem Akhtar, *The Crises of Education in Pakistan: State, Education, and the Textbooks* (Lahore: Al-Abbas International, 2005AD), 114-117
- (7) Salma Nawaz, “Family Laws in Pakistan: A historical Introduction,” *PLJ Lawsite*, <https://www.pljlawsite.com/2011art3.htm>

consequences of all premises, leading 'Ulamā established first recognized Madrassah in 1867 in sub-continent known as *Dār-ul-'Ulūm Deoband* and after passage of time, it become one school of thought known as *Deobandi*. *Dars-e-Nizāmi* after slight changes was adopted as proper course in *Dār-ul-'Ulūm*.<sup>(1)</sup> The main objective of establishing *Dār-ul-'Ulūm Deoband* was to secure Islamic heritage, education, teaching and freedom of Muslims thoughts through peaceful movement. After that, two types of education were being followed in sub-continent; one was secular education and second was Madrassah education. Secular education was administered by British government and Madrassah was run by Islamic scholars on the basis of Muslims donations and charity.

Replacement of Persian as official language by English isolated the Muslims from governmental jobs and change in legal system also restricted Islamic religious scholar from public policy and administrative issues of country. Realizing this fact, *Sir Syed Ahmed Khan* established modern educational institute known as *Aligarh College*. The main objectives of this institute were to deliver contemporary knowledge to Muslims students and bring them into mainstream professions by involving them in existing infrastructure of that time. The idea of modern education was severely opposed by traditional 'Ulamā by criticizing them that they are doing advocacy of British government and want to impart ideology of west in mind of Muslim society. He was also declared the enemy of Muslim heritage and Islamic thoughts. However, it disclosed the avenues for Muslim students, opportunities and chances to take part in administrative issues of country and public policy processes. Realizing the importance of contemporary education, in 1891, *Muhammad Ali Mungri* established the institute named as *Nadvat-ul-'Ulamā*. Its primary focus was to establish bridge between secular and religious education system but this institute could not realize the importance of integration and coordination of both educational system. Based on Modern education, Muslim learnt English and successfully carried out freedom struggle for an independent Muslim State.

After the independence in 1947, Pakistan was blessed by two diversified type of educational system in heritage such as secular education and Madrassah education. After the few years, government of Pakistan established *Auqāf* department under the ministry of religious affairs, to engage the clergy in public policy and integrate with other conventional education system. By and large, clergy was excluded from public policy

(1) Aziz Talbani, "Pedagogy, Power, and Discourse: Transformation of Islamic Education," *Comparative Education Review* 40, No. 1 (1996AD), 66-82

processes and restricted to only religious thoughts (sectarian education) after the passage of time. In fact, the main reasons of their isolation and divergence were; out-dated sect specific curricula, widely use of *Fatwa* at every public issue which cause violence in society and inflexibility in religious thoughts.

First attempt after the independence about the Madrassah education reform was made in the regime of general Ayub Khan in 1961. For this purpose, committee for the revision of curricula of Madrassahs was formed under the supervision of ministry of education. The main objective of that committee was to; bring them in mainstream education and get control on financial and administrative issues of Madrassah under government supervision. The committee proposed that contemporary and need-based subjects should be included in curricula of Madrassahs along with religious subjects to meet the challenges of growing and emerging trends of market. Due to lack of sincerity, fear about loss of control and political objectives of clergy, initiative of reform could not gain the fruitful results. This attempt was declared as conspiracy of government to weaken the strength and influence of religious political forces in country. After the *Ayub Khan*, first elected government of *Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto* took initiative of Madrassah reform in 1975. Likewise, pervious attempt, the result of this initiative was unfruitful and government of Z.A Bhutto was replaced by Martial law of general Zia with help of clergy in the result of Pakistan National Alliance (PNA).

In 1978, General Zia ordered the ministry of religious affairs to prepare the report on Madrassah that how to reform it and engage the clergy in mainstream education. In this report, ministry informed general Zia that all previous efforts to unite and reform Madrassah had failed due to skepticisms about reform that it is an effort to dilute the intention of religious sector from core Islamic values like *Jihād*,<sup>(1)</sup> preach and religious education toward secular education and western way of life. In previous initiatives of reform, strongest opposition came from *Deobandi* school of thought's '*Ulamā* and they want to maintain status quo since they came into force. In this report, participants also suggested to; bring them into mainstream education by including need-based and market oriented subject and integrate them with mainstream profession by providing jobs opportunities in conventional schools, colleges and universities. They also proposed to establish National institute of *Dīnī-Madāris* for the better communication and coordination of various schools of thought. Some

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(1) Nosheen Ali, "Books vs Bombs? Humanitarian development and the narrative of terror in Northern Pakistan," *Third World Quarterly* 31, No. 4 (2010AD), 541-559

leading ‘Ulamā from various schools of thought opposed these suggestions and process of reform.

After the few years, Soviet Union attack on Afghanistan, this issue was placed back and government of Zia focused on rhetoric of protection Islam and Afghanistan as political expediency and engage clergy specially *Deobandi* school of thought in Afghanistan *Jihād*.<sup>(1)</sup> That time, in the curriculum of Madrassah, four thoughts about *Jihād* were included which are the base of extremism. The purpose of inclusion of these thoughts was to motivate *Jihādists* against Russian aggression. These fundamental thoughts are: 1. Polytheism or apostasy committed anywhere in world, all are punishable by death and we have an authority to prosecute punishment. 2. Muslim was born to be subjugated and none other than Muslims have the right to govern which mean all non-Muslims governments are illegitimate. 3. Muslims all over the world should be under the rule of single Islamic government which is called Caliphate. Separate and independent Muslims states have no legitimacy. 4. Notion of modern and sovereign state is polytheism and has no room in Islam.<sup>(2)</sup> After the completion of Afghanistan *Jihād*, Madrassahs were used as source of training of *Jihādists* which causes extremist and terrorist views in the society. Most of *Jihādists of Afghanistan* were used in Kashmir conflict zone. So on and so forth, the activities of *Jihādists* were continuously increasing in Pakistan from 1988 to 2002 and these *Jihādists* were also supported by Taliban government in Afghanistan. Existing curriculum of Madrassah, religious norms and thoughts have deeper penetration on thinking and behavior of seminaries. It indicates that structural influences on behaviors are at high degree.<sup>(3)</sup> Peter M. Senge (1994) presented a theory ‘*structural influences behavior*’, where he stated that structure influence the behaviors of people in both way positive and negative. Due to such influence for long run like Madrassah from 1867 to date, people associated with such type of structure become the prisoner of their own thinking or system. He proposed that this issue can be resolved by redefining the scope of influence through new structure.<sup>(4)</sup>

(1) Behuria, “Sects Within Sect”, 70-71

(2) Javed Ahmed Ghamidi, *Root Cause of Terrorism and ISIS*, (Al-Mawrid a Foundation for Islaimic Research and Education, 2015AD), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=andINEkrX50>

(3) Husain Haqqani, “Our Jihad Addiction”, January 20, 2015 <https://www.hudson.org/research/10945-our-jihad-addiction>

(4) Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practices of Learning Organization*, (New York: Doubleday, 1990AD), 42-47



After the 9/11, USA decided to attack on Afghanistan. Most of previous *Jihādists* were recruited for again Afghanistan *Jihād*. Now that time, most of Madrassahs in tribal areas of Pakistan were the source of recruitment of *Jihādists* for Afghanistan. Now Government of Pakistan and international community specially America, were keenly interested to reform in the Madrassah curriculum specially four thoughts which were inductive during *Afghan Jihād*. Now it is the perception of international community that non-reformed Madrassah are quickly rising as major source of training for *extremist* and *Jihādists*.<sup>(1)</sup> General Musharraf advised the ministry of religious affairs to reform the Madrassah education and designed the National Education Policy. The main focal points of policy were to; bridge gap between contemporary education and Madrassahs, equate their degrees with conventional education system, provide the valuable books for research and integrate both educational system with each other. Madrassah Reform Project (MRP) was introduced in 2003 with mutual understanding of federal, provincials and local educational authorities for executing a multi-million rupees project for reforming 8,000 Madrassahs within five years.<sup>(2)</sup> Owing to the lack of understanding between both sides in the past, the present (MRP) initiatives seem to have met the same fate at the completion of its five years tenure. Five years on, the pessimist outlook has been prove right, and the government has decided to wrap up the project after having targeted only a small fraction of some 8,000 Madrassahs (as per the Education and Planning Commission) in the country. The Ministry of Education is forthright in admitting its failure 'In the last five years we reached out to only 507 madāris.'<sup>(3)</sup>

In the early days of Islam, same Madrassah was used to be the hub of gaining knowledge to include scientific, administrative, artistic, religious etc subjects. After colonial rule in sub-continent, the populace connected with Madrassahs has created sphere around them and tends to stay within it. Later in order to preserve its core they got limited to sectarian based curricula only. They are neither prepared to get out from this circle for diverse knowledge nor integrated with other educational system.<sup>(4)</sup> They

(1) Aisha Ismail and Shehla Amjad, "Determinants of terrorism in Pakistan: An empirical investigation," *Economic Modelling*, 37, (2014AD), 320–331

(2) Klasra, "Curricula of 8,000 madaris being changed".

(3) Nasrullah Tahir Dogar, "Madrassa Reforms-Problems and Prospects," *NDU Journal*, 1, (2010AD), 1-25

(4) K. R. McClure, "Madrasas and Pakistan's education agenda: Western media misrepresentation and policy recommendations," *International Journal of Educational Development* 29, No. 2 (2009AD), 331–346

seldom go for higher education and tend to adjust themselves in the existing religious sphere. After the terrorist attack on Army public school in Peshawar in December, 2014, government strictly decided to redefine the scope of influence in term of complete Madrassah reform through National Action Plan. Madrassah education is becoming emerging unsolved issue in Pakistani society. Madrassah has drifted away from its own prime objective like imparting education and become involved in other hidden activities such, as training of *Jihādists*, Refutation of other sects and creation of extremist views against each other contrary to its main objectives. Madrassah reforms are widely believed to be the only remedy to overcome this problem.

### Methodology

This research intends to explore the factors which have strong roots in maintaining the status quo on the reforms in Madrassahs education in Pakistan. An extensive literature review explored the genesis of the Madrassah and traced its historical context from the early Islamic era to date. For this a qualitative framework was designed in consultation with the target respondents and people working on this area. The contents and questions were deliberated and discussed in detail before gathering data. This framework of data collection helped in sensitizing respondents on these issues central in resisting change through sustained discussions and meetings. The clerics represent a diverse mix of various schools of thoughts, rural-urban spread, and comprehensive mix of representations from government, civil society and other stakeholders. Researchers employed interviews, conducted focus groups discussions, face to face interviews, discussions and roundtables.

### Discussion and Analysis

*Question: 1 What Madrassah reform mean in point of view of different actors?*

#### a. Government Narrative

Reforming Madrassahs has a significant importance in the prevailing situation. Therefore, new developments at international level which started from the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 (World Trade Center) highlighted the importance of Madrassah reforms not only for Pakistan but also for the whole Muslim World. Madrassah reforms are the need of time to counter militant Jihādists ideologies and to bring Madrassah students in the main stream.

Madrassah education reform means to; bring Madrassahs into mainstream education and have strong regulatory check on financial and administrative issues of Madrassah by the government. Therefore,

curricula reform in the dire need of time to create alternative narrative. Therefore, contemporary and need-based subjects should be included in curricula of Madrassahs. In this way, we can bring Madrassah students at par with the students of other school system as well as to meet the challenges of growing and emerging trends of market.

It is dire need to create alternative narrative on terrorism and radicalization. For this purpose, government along with all the opposition parties has formulated and approved 'National Action Plan'. Madrassah reform and main streaming Madrassah students is one of the point in 20 points of National Action Plan (NAP). Beside this, Government also want to integrate Madrassah students with mainstream profession by providing jobs opportunities in conventional schools, colleges and universities as teaching staff in Islamic and Arabic studies. This will create enabling environment for effective communication in every segment of the society. Madrassah reforms are the effective way to bring isolated segment of the society in the main stream. This will create enabling environment to improve the living standard of the unheard segment of the society as well as break communication barrier among segment of the society. With the integration of contemporary educational system, it can assist them to develop a sense of analytical thinking, creative thinking, and innovative ideas development. Therefore, Madrassah reform/ main streaming will provide equal opportunities to Madrassah students to become knowledge worker exiting in knowledge era. It leads to create enabling environment of peaceful coexistence and foundation of peaceful and just society.

#### **b. Clerics discourse**

Clerics (associated with Madrassah) strongly opposed the Madrassah reforms. They have adopted critical approach towards Madrassah reforms and resist to include need base subjects. They have criticized the secular education which they thought of western agenda. Therefore, Madrassah reforms are considered as attack in religion without giving any deliberation to the reforms and its intent. This shows that religious actors have fear to loss the existing status quo which is challenged by Madrassah reforms. These clerics (religious community) are of the view that well qualified individuals along with religious education is not as good Muslims as they are and may pose threat to the religion as well as fulfill the western agenda. In addition to the perceptions explained, the religious ranks also feel connected with the respected scholars / religious saints who are identified on the basis of old ways. They believe that there is neither any role model for the new ways of Madrassah education nor any earlier precedence of modernization of Madrassahs exists in the recent history. These perceptions and attitude is the hindrance in the Madrassah

reforms. Clerics (associated with Madrassahs) are in favor of status quo and against the modern education therefore, those who run Madrassahs regard modernization of Madrassah as westernization.<sup>(1)</sup> Beside this, they believed that Madrassah reform is not required since religious needs of the society are already fulfilling by the current Madrassah system. There is a huge risk involved in modernization of Madrassah as compared to its benefits. They are often careful to camouflage this by claiming that such Madrassah reforms are supposedly counterproductive or ‘anti-Islam’ and so on.

*Question: 2 what are main obstacles in the process of reform?*

**i. Change in Curriculum**

All the Madrassahs have same traditional structure of the *Dars-i-Nizāmi*. The course of study in all Madrassahs except that of the Shia, revolves around the teaching of *Hanafi fiqh*. Most of the syllabus/texts are more than 500 years old.<sup>(2)</sup> Clerics (*‘Ulamā*) taught texts with the help of commentaries and notes penned by medieval Hanafi *‘Ulamā* for non-native students particularly for South Asian students because of their limited knowledge of Arabic. They have no longer explained the original text. Therefore, they have to learn by heart which makes students to use their memory instead of analytical skills. This system is functioning with the efforts to preserve the old traditions. This led to the stagnation of knowledge which earned criticism from scholars both western and Pakistani. Therefore, it is dire need of time to introduced comprehensive Madrassah reform which enables Madrassah students to be part of main stream education system along with religious education.

Most of Madrassahs are following standard syllabus for *Dars-e-Nizāmi*. Therefore, the syllabus has been modified over time without change in the basic essence.<sup>(3)</sup> Literature on Madrassah reforms shows that unnecessary subjects in *Dars-e-Nizāmi* should be reduced to make room for the non-religious subjects (subjects of the modern and secular education system). It will be difficult to study large number of subjects of both streams (religious and other educational subjects). Therefore, the religious subjects can be diluted a little without reducing its core contents. Persian grammar, Arabic grammar, chirography, *Fiqh* (jurisprudence),

- (1) P. Brykczynski, “Religious Modernism, Nationalism, and Antisemitism in Polish Catholicism and Egyptian Islam,” *Journal of Religion and Society*, 16, (2014AD), 1-25
- (2) Abdul Rauf Iqbal & Ms. Sobia Raza, “Madrassa Reforms in Pakistan: A Historical Analysis,” *IRSA Papers*, 17, (2015AD), 27-50
- (3) Dogar, “Madrassa Reforms-Problems and Prospects”, 7.

Mantiq (logic), fun-e-khaṭābat (rhetoric), Arabic literature, detailed and old interpretations, and ‘*Ilm-al-Kalām*’ (Scholaristics) may be dilated to include non-theological subjects at basic level. Hence, these subjects may be taught in detail at higher secondary and graduation level only to those who choose to become *Alim/ Mufti*. However, the core contents of religious curricula i.e. Tajvīd, basic Arabic grammar, Tafsīr, Ḥadīth, Sīrat-al-nabī, ‘Aqā’id (beliefs) & Islamic history must remain the same. The Islamic text which is taught in Madrassahs is based on books known as *Dars-e-Nizāmi*.

Madrassah education is producing traditional clergymen and vanguard of various sects. This indicates disconnect with modern education which is required for the contemporary job market. Therefore, Madrassah reform is very much important to bring student into mainstream as well as connect with the job market. They can only get jobs if they have required skills which come from contemporary education system. On the other hand, clergymen and defenders of Madrassah considered entire syllabus of *Dars-e-Nizāmi* essential for the religious education. They wanted to follow the footsteps of their forefathers and interested to maintain status quo. Beside this, they perceived that research of their predecessor’s is very much relevant for the current needs and knowledge economy. They also considered this ultimate truth which requires no further research. This tendency has seized their ability to analyze, correlate and apply logic without rigidity which resistance to reform. Apart from this, the religious ranks associated with Madrassah often give their arguments that medical colleges produce doctors, engineering college produce engineers so on and so forth. Similarly, Madrassah produce religious professionals (clerics) which required no reforms in Madrassah curricula.

#### ii. **Financial Control**

Financial needs of the Madrassahs are mostly met through the charity and zakat. People gave their zakat and charity to the Madrassah administration to meet the financial needs of the Madrassahs. Sometimes, some individual chooses to give a Madrassah a big grant or well-off households take it upon themselves to meet the needs of Madrassahs and their students. Beside this, Madrassahs received huge funds on special events like on *Eid ul Fiṭr*, Muslims give *fiṭrana* (eid donations) and on *Eid-ul-Adḥa*, Muslims often donate the skin of the sacrificial animal to the Madrassahs. Therefore, the funds generated through collected animal skins are good enough to meet the Madrassah expenditure for five to six months without any assistance. They have also regularly raised funds on *jum’a* prayers. Apart from this, Some Madrassahs have permanent sources of income, such as land, buildings, shops and other property that produce

regular returns to meet the financial requirements. Registered Madrassahs received funds from Government as well.

Madrassah administrator known as *Muntaẓim* is responsible for the financial matters. He is normally second to the Madrassah head and performing various activities like coordination, treasurer, book keeper, and funds management etc. He carries out all the expenditures on the approval of Madrassah Head and keeps the record updated. Besides this, there is no system to carrying out any audits especially the external audits. This indicates that there is no check on the financial expenditure on activities. There are also serious concerns over foreign funding to different sects in the country. Therefore, clergy (who own and run Madrassah) have very strong control over Madrassah's affairs like management, funding, and other activities. '*Ulamā* (religious leaders) have hegemony over Madrassahs and are hesitant to check and balance on their activities including financial. Whenever government and civil society have talked about Madrassah reforms, it was usually unwelcomed by the religious community. They highly criticize the Madrassah reforms and labeled it as western agenda against Islam. Beside this, Madrassah reforms will challenge the hegemony of the clergy. Madrassah reforms is creating fear among clergy ('*Ulamā* who are running Madrassahs) for the loss of power both financial and social status. Madrassah reform will enable the government to regulate Madrassah activities including syllabus. This will also enable government to have a strong check and balance on financial matters as well as conduct external audit.

### **iii. Change in Regulation (State Authority over institutions/Madrassahs)**

Madrassahs syllabus and examination is regulated and control by the Boards of the respective sect. These boards are autonomous bodies recognized by government and its functions are not directly controlled by the government. Government institutions like ministry of education and religious affairs are coordinating activities of Madrassah boards. The Ministry of Education is responsible for issuance of equivalent certificates to the Madrassah students through HEC. However, respective *Wafāq-ul-Madāris* of different sects are responsible of organizing central examination of registered Madrassahs under them. Degrees of these registered Madrassahs are recognized, and equivalence certificates are issued only to those Madrassah students. Apart from this, neither *Wafāq-ul-Madāris* nor Madrassahs have any linkage and coordination with boards of education (federal / provincial) for curricula development as well as to assist their students for higher education other than religious subjects

(means non-theological subjects) i.e. humanities, arts and natural / social / management sciences.

Madrassah reform is the dire need of time and to successful implementation of National Action Plan (NAP). Government should have registered and regulate Madrassahs across the country. Government should have strong check and balance on financial matter of Madrassahs as well as external audit is important to monitor the activities of the Madrassahs. This will help to regulate the Madrassahs activities which will ensure strong check on the promotion of specific ideology. Beside this, Madrassah reform will integrate religious and formal education sectors. Government should establish Madrassah education boards at both federal and provincial level. *Wafāq-ul-Madāris* along with other Madrassahs should be under Madrassah education board. There should be uniform curricula both in Madrassahs and formal education sector. Curricula development and revision is vital step in Madrassah reform which has significant impact to bring Madrassah mainstreaming. Madrassahs should include non-theological subject along with religious subject in the Madrassah education. There is dire need to include need base subject in the Madrassah education which is the need of labor market. This will help Madrassah students to get equal opportunity in the job market and bring them in the mainstream. This will also enable them to become the productive member of the society.

Religious ranks have certain concerns over Madrassah reforms such as loss of social status, loss of financial control, check and balance on Madrassah activities, and lack of skills and expertise to deal with reforms. They are very reluctant to secular education as they perceive it is western agenda. Therefore, government should create enabling environment for Madrassah reforms as well as address the concerns of the religious ranks.

iv. **Vested Interest (political interest/influence/gain)**

Generally, religious ranks (associated with Madrassahs) have critical approach towards Madrassah reforms. They are reluctant to Madrassah reforms as mentioned above because of their vested interest. In 2001-02 Madrassah reforms initiative has been taken by the Musharraf Govt. Therefore, religious ranks from all the sects agreed to established Ittihad Tanzīm ul Madāris-e-Dīniyah. The main purpose of this organization is to resist any modernization adventure undertaken by the government. This opposition, to any substantial reforms of Madrassahs, is because of their political expediency to maintain their political status in society. The religious ranks support to maintain status quo since they fear that they will lose their existing status / respect and there by lose their existing quality of life. They also feel that there will be a loss of power / control & influence

in society. The other individuals will take over their domain and will hurt their interests. They are often careful to camouflage this by claiming that such Madrassah reforms are supposedly counterproductive or 'anti-Islam' and so on.

At times, those who run Madrassahs also get under the peer pressures and pressures from society/environment. They feel that if they will support the modernization of Madrassahs there will be strong reaction against them and their survival under such circumstances may not be possible. On the face of it they show resistance along with others even if their thoughts correspond to the idea of modernization. Many religious scholars, who understand the need for reforming the Madrassah structure on modern lines, set the issue aside on the pretext that it is a controversial issue which should be avoided rather than asking for troubles. There is a great segregation among religious ranks and have divided into various sects and sub-sects. This confuse the people that which brand of religion is correct and to be followed.

Presently Madrassahs are not playing that an effective role which it should be playing through its education to reduce sectarian divide and conflicts in society. Rather few Madrassahs are spreading extremism on the name of *Jihād*. The main purpose of the religious education is to create a positive social impact on society. It should have a major role in peace and stability. In contrast, no worthwhile impact is viewed. This has kept religious ranks away from the corridors of power to make any worthwhile impact. Few religious ranks which have the accessibility to power structure are driven by political expediency. They maintain their domains through generations as in case of tribal leaders and by design keep their people unaware / uneducated in apprehension of any possible resistance if they get education.

Question: 3 *what are skepticisms about reform?*

There are many skepticisms which are associated with Madrassah reform such as; first, loss of power and control, second, overload of current tasks, third, pressures of daily activities and limited resources, fourth, lack of skills and experience need to manage the change effectively, fifth, fear of job loss, and last the disagreement with the new way and skepticism about the need for change. Similarly, fundamental norms, values and skepticism about updated and need of scholarly education are major hindrances in Madrassah's reforms. The Modern education in the Madrassah is perceived as western based education and it is totally against the fundamental norms and values of the Madrassah structures. Madrassah students perceive social issues from their own perspective which often leads to imbalance in the public policies. The reality behind such thinking



is lack of update knowledge about public policy, lack of interaction with different thoughts of people and lack of system thinking. They perceived that it is westernization and risk in modernization of Madrassah is more than maintaining status quo.

Most of them perceived that religious ranks feel connected with the respected scholars / religious saints who are identified on the basis of old ways and there are neither any role model for the new ways of Madrassah education nor any earlier precedence of modernization of Madrassahs exists in the recent history. Majority of them thought that religious ranks are doubtful with regards to the soundness of modernization plan and feel that there are hidden agendas behind the modernization of Madrassahs.

There is a fear among religious ranks that there will be a loss of power/control by individuals taking over their domain. Due to this, religious ranks think that modernization of Madrassah is not required since religious needs of the society are already met. Another common argument given by the religious ranks to pose resistance is the lack of resources and experienced staff / teachers to establish Madrassahs on modern lines. They contest that if the Madrassahs are to be modernized within the existing resources there will be extra burden of work. Such an argument often loses its strength when they decline grants from government in anticipation of any intrusion in their sphere.

## **Conclusion**

Government was unable to provide basic services like health, education and social welfare. Consequently, this has created a huge gap between demand and supply of basic services. Therefore, Madrassahs attract students from low social strata of society by providing free education, food, shelter, and clothes. This creates an enabling environment for the Madrassahs to provide education to the unheard segment of the society to inculcate their philosophy which creates religious intolerance among different sects. This has impact of Pakistan society which is battling hard against the menace of extremism and intolerance.

*Madrassahs* are therefore, the only viable educational option for poor strata since they cannot afford to provide basic services. Although, Madrassahs made great contributions in providing education to poor segment of the society but at the same time it also failed to provide them need base education which is the requirement of labor market due to specific curricula. Therefore, this only creates employment in religious circles like in Madrassah and mosques etc. This has kept religious ranks away from the corridors of power and civil society movements.

Madrassah reforms are widely believed to be the only remedy to overcome this problem. This will enable religious ranks to get out of their shell and interact with other segments of society by joining various professions. This will bring Madrassah students in the main stream and give equal opportunity in the employment. This will also improve the quality of life and access to basic services. This will create enable environment for Madrassah students to mingle with other segment of society which enable their colleagues to understand religious views without fears, perceptions, and prejudices. This will not only empower the poor segment of society but also bring together a diverse group of people close enough to understand each other. In a result, it will reduce fraction, frustration and conflict in the society. This will also help to make peaceful and tolerance society which creates enabling environment to counter extremism and radicalization.

